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ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO THE GRADUATES

OF

WASHINGTON MEDICAL COLLEGE,

BALTIMORE;

AT THE ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT,

ON MONDAY MARCH 17, 1834.

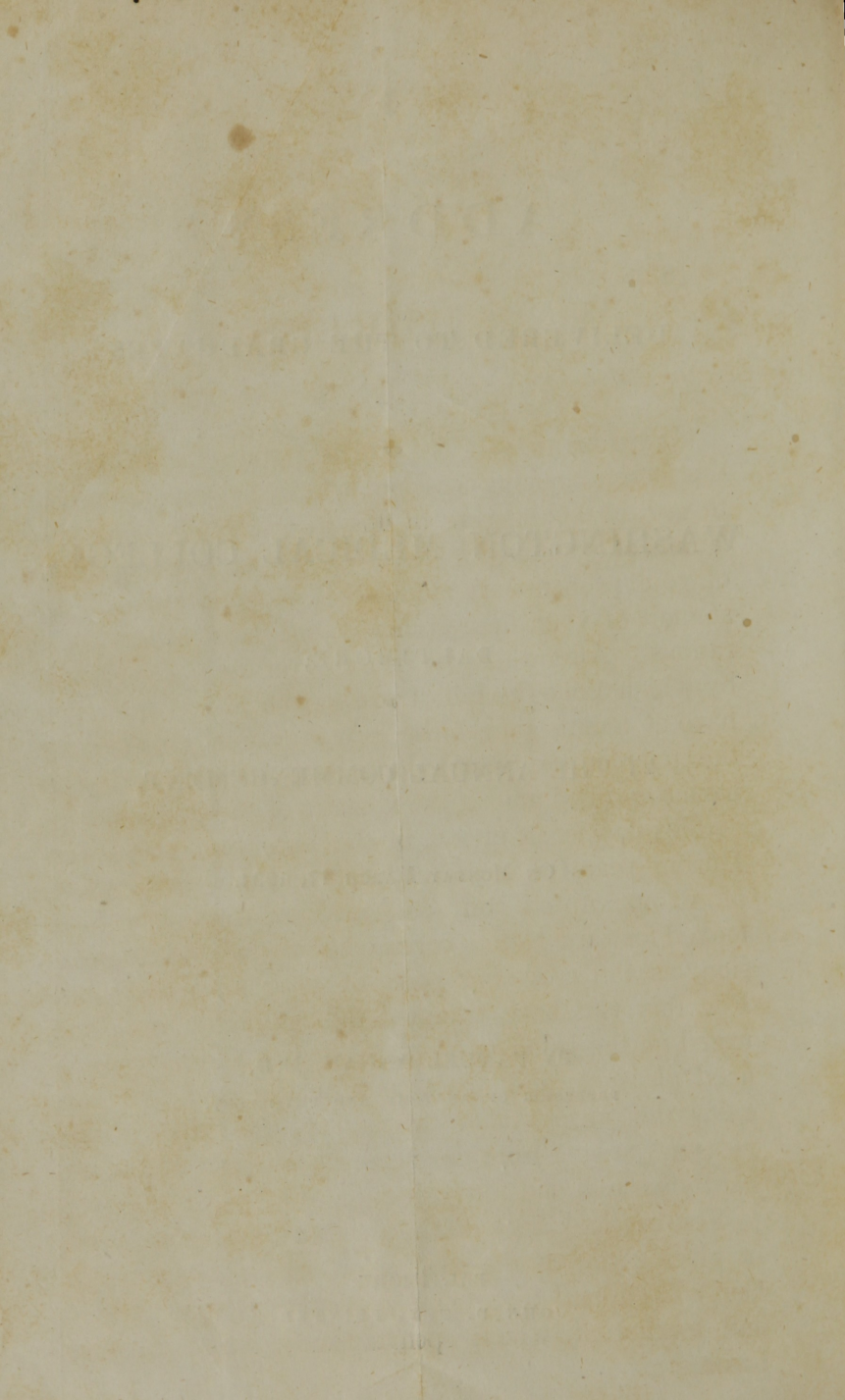
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BALTIMORE:

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ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN:—It is peculiarly gratifying to me, on this most interesting occasion, to be empowered to present to you, in the hearing of this assembly, the congratulations of your instructors, upon the happy termination of your probationary studies. You have attained the summit of your highest hopes, and most ardent aspirations. After a toilsome march over the rugged roads, by which alone the hill of science can be ascended, you have at length gained the lofty elevation, crowned by the temple; the portals have been opened; and your names enrolled among the votaries of the goddess.

This day is an epoch, in the history of your lives. During years of incessant labor, and unwearied effort, of uninterrupted toil, and anxious care, you have looked forward to the ceremonial of the present occasion, as the crowning point of your fondest desires. For this you have trimmed the midnight lamp, and urged on the jaded intellect. For this you have sacrificed pleasure, and profit, and health; and you now enjoy the unspeakable satisfaction, the indescribable pleasure, arising from the secure possession of honors, hardly earned, and justly due.

You can look back on the time and labor expended, in placing you on the spot, upon which you are now firmly fixed, and give full play to the glow of delight and exultation, which spontaneously arises in your bosoms.

The consciousness of being the recipient of well-merited honor, is certainly one of the most exhilarating feelings, of which our nature is susceptible.

Each of you, gentlemen, can say, my own good conduct and persevering efforts, have enabled me to reach this once-distant, and long-looked for goal—by my own powers, I have obtained the triumph—it is my own good right hand that has achieved the victory.

But this is an interesting epoch, not only in relation to the past, but also in reference to the future. You are now members of a dignified and honorable profession. You have assumed the “*toga virilis*.” You came in here minors, in one sense of the word—you will go forth to take your places as men, in the ranks of men; and to play your parts in the great drama of life, either for good or evil. You now commence a new stage of existence. You take a fresh start in life. And inasmuch as it is of vast importance to the success of any undertaking, that we make a good beginning, I trust I may be permitted, as one who wishes you well, to present for your consideration, a few words of parting advice.

The profession you have selected, is one whose duties are arduous in no ordinary degree. Among these duties, the first, is the obligation you are under to those, who entrust their health and life to your care. The dearest of all possessions—that which we grasp with greatest firmness—which we retain with greatest tenacity—and relinquish most unwillingly, will be committed to your guardianship. It will therefore be incumbent upon you, to watch over this invaluable deposit with ceaseless assiduity. No sacrifice of pleasure or self-gratification should be refused. No feeling of weariness indulged. No sallies of passion allowed. The man who will suffer himself to slumber at his post,

or desert it in a fit of peevishness or irritability, is unfit to be a physician.

The enemy you have to encounter is constantly active. He neither slumbers nor sleeps. And a slight inattention, not unfrequently allows him to secure a position, from which all subsequent attempts to dislodge are found to be unavailing.

It is not sufficient, that you examine carefully the indications of disease, while placed before you; believing, as some do, that you are required to devote only that portion of your time and attention to the sick, which passes in their presence; and that so soon as you have left the chamber of disease, its suffering inmates may be banished from your memory. The good physician, is he who gives all the best energies of his mind to the welfare of his patients. He reflects upon their situation when at a distance from them; he revolves the various aspects of their maladies. The method of assuaging their pain, and mitigating their anguish, forms the subject of his meditations by day, and his dreams by night. In a word, he embarks in his profession, "con amore;" and he who is not somewhat of an enthusiast; who has not confidence in his own science, as far as enlightened reason will justify; who does not admire and love it, as one of heaven's best gifts to man, will never become pre-eminent; will never be distinguished as a great medical philosopher, and benefactor of the human family. It is true, he may plod his weary way, along the dull routine of an unimproving practice. He may prescribe certain remedies for particular assemblages of symptoms, to which he affixes the nosological names of his ancestors; and he may do this, because he was so taught by his preceptors—because it was considered right by his predecessors. But although he may be legally entitled to the appellation of Doctor, he is nevertheless the veriest charlatan—a

perfect specimen of quackery—and but one degree removed from those, who, utterly regardless of symptoms, causes, or effects, peculiarity of constitution, or circumstances, have but one remedy, for all possible varieties, modes, forms, and stages of disease.

An enlightened and scientific physician, in his anxiety for the benefit of his patients, will endeavor to trace effects back to their causes—he will scrutinize the operation of those causes; and referring to the established laws of the organism, he will work out a rational view of the morbid action which is going on; and frame precise indications, on which to base the application of his remedies. And in all cases where the issue is unfortunate, and such cases you will meet—as we have not received power to destroy death, and triumph over the grave—he will not rest satisfied with Dr. Sangrado's reasoning, that they died, because they did not take enough of his medicine—because they were not bled sufficiently, and did not drink enough of warm water; but he will thoroughly review the whole progress of the disease, rigidly criticize his own treatment, and endeavor to ascertain wherein the deficiency lay, if any existed on his part. He will imitate Dr. Rush, who, when the yellow fever made its appearance in Philadelphia in 1793, at which time it was a new disease, not having been seen during the preceding thirty-one years, soon began to suspect that the two first modes of treatment which he practised, one by the advice of a physician from the West Indies, were unworthy of confidence, and that the dreadful fatality was to be ascribed rather to the injudicious management, than the malignity of the fever. He informs us, that baffled in every attempt to stop the ravages of this direful malady, he anticipated all the numerous and complicated distresses in that city, which pestilential diseases have so often produced in other countries. “The fever,” he says, “had

a malignity and an obstinacy which I had never before observed in any disease, and it spread with a rapidity and mortality far beyond what attended it, when it last appeared in 1762. Heaven alone bore witness to the anguish of my soul in this awful situation. But I did not abandon a hope that the disease might yet be cured. I had long believed that good was commensurate with evil, and that there does not exist a disease for which the goodness of Providence has not provided a remedy. Under the impression of this belief I applied myself with fresh ardor to the investigation of the disease before me. I ransacked my library, and pored over every book that treated of the yellow fever." The result of his researches for a while was fruitless; but at length he came across a plan of treatment, which subsequent experience has proved to be admirably adapted to the cure of the disease. He adds, "never can I forget the transport with which one of the physicians to whom I had communicated the plan, ran across Third street, to inform me that the disease yielded to it in nearly every case."

I have, therefore, gentlemen to caution you against the influence of false prejudices. Disabuse your minds of an undue veneration for great names; and above all, repudiate that fondness for hypothesis, which is the besetting sin of so large a number of our profession.

Respect for the talents and attainments of our predecessors should always be cherished. We should admire them for their solid contributions to the treasury of truth; and regard their errors as venial offences; unavoidable at the period, and in the state of science, during which they flourished. But we should not bow down in base adulation, and offer the worship of fulsome flattery, at the shrine of their merits, however great they may be. We occupy the vantage-ground, having had them as pioneers to prepare the way for

us; and we would be degenerate sons, if we did not push forward in advance of their line of demarcation, and open up new prospects to those who will be our successors.

Most minds are fascinated by the tinsel glitter of an ingenious hypothesis; and it requires an unusual share of stability of character, and self-command, to escape being infolded in its noxious embrace.

There is something peculiarly pleasing, in the thought of being the discoverer of a royal road to science—one that is shorter, and smoother, than the old circuitous route. Men have been exercising their ingenuity, for this purpose, during every age since the creation. Our first parents had scarcely come into existence till they tried it. They wanted to have their eyes instantaneously opened, and to become as Gods, knowing good and evil; and their posterity have been laboring at it ever since. But every attempt has proved abortive; and the authors and their conjectures, have both disappeared in the unfathomable gulf of oblivion; out of which there is no resurrection.

An undue respect for great names, and a fondness for hypothesis, have done incalculable mischief, in every department of art and science; but it is in medicine they are especially to be guarded against. They have slain their thousands and tens of thousands. And it should always be remembered, that while in other occupations, it is, for the most part, but property which is endangered, in ours, it is life, the most precious of all deposits, and at best held by an uncertain tenure, that is brought into jeopardy.

It is facts, and legitimate induction, which constitute true science; and the great object of all preliminary education, should be, to discipline the mind to the patient exercise of the cold-blooded deductions of an unsophisticated logic; to accustom it to repress the va-

garies of a prurient imagination; and to distinguish the sober livery of truth, from the gaudy embellishment, and meretricious ornament of error.

The medical philosopher should flee poetry and all its vanities. The fine arts should be an abomination unto him.

Look over the history of medicine, and see who have been its greatest benefactors. Is it Akenside and Darwin? Men of resplendent genius, whose thoughts glitter like the sun-beam, and attract the ardent and admiring gaze of all beholders; but to apply them to the wear and tear of the ordinary business of life, would be desecration. Is it not rather Hunter and Bell, Bichat and Magendie? Faithful and laborious cultivators of the wilderness of undiscovered facts; whose imaginations were kept in due subjection, by the inflexible authority of uncompromising reason. I need not pause for a reply. The former are now but faintly remembered, as truants upon Parnassus, and as having been intoxicated by sipping of the Castalian spring; while the latter have created for themselves a reputation, as advancers of science and friends of humanity, more durable than monumental marble.

Habits of accurate observation and critical analysis, are of paramount importance to the medical inquirer. Disease is so much modified and altered, by vicissitudes of climate, changes in the manner of living, and peculiarities of constitution, that remedies of a certain quality, and in determinate quantities, are not applicable to all cases apparently analogous. And in addition to all this, we are occasionally visited by new epidemics, or new forms of old diseases, which baffle our utmost skill, until we become familiar with their mode of attack.

The ancient Romans, in their progress to universal empire, met with nations whose new and unusual mode of fighting, disconcerted their ablest tacticians, and dis-

mayed their most intrepid legions; and it was not until they became acquainted with their manner of assault, and were thus forewarned and forearmed, that they waged successful war.

The physician has thus to be prepared, to meet disease in every possible variety of shape and form. And he who has not the talent, to profit by his very defeats—to learn to combat successfully from the skilful manœuvring of his enemy, has natural disqualifications, which unfit him for arriving at high eminence.

It is owing to this intellectual poverty, that we observe some members of the profession, making no advancement in the course of a long life. They have not in early youth, formed habits of close and accurate observation, and new facts, presented before them, entirely escape their notice. “Eyes have they, but they see not. Ears have they, but they hear not.”

It has been well observed by a distinguished philosopher, that this class of persons is not without its use to the historian of the human mind. “Immovably moored to the same station, by the strength of their cables, and the weight of their anchors, they enable him to measure the rapidity of the current by which the rest of the world are borne along.” But this is at best a miserable compensation, for the injury done to the cause of truth, by their grappling and obstructing the noble fleet, laden with improvement, which is sailing by them, with flowing sheet and swelling sail, while wind and tide are both impelling them onwards.

It is this class of persons, who can see no merit in any thing that is not rendered venerable, by the dust of ages—that has not the seal of antiquity to recommend it. They are in constant opposition to all innovation. They fight manfully against every thing that wears the semblance of novelty. They assume as an indisputable truth, that every thing new, is therefore false. That

the very fact of its not having been discovered by our wise forefathers, is "prima facie" evidence that it is error.

You perceive then, gentlemen, that while I caution you on the one hand, against indulging in visionary speculation, and vague and uncertain hypothesis, I would equally guard you, on the other, against allowing false prejudices to become inveterate. Both are insuperable obstacles to the advance of true science. "In medio tutissimus ibis."

Accustom yourselves to a careful collection and arrangement of facts; and then by a cautious induction establish principles. Strive against the natural tendency of our minds, to bring our facts to quadrate with our preconceived opinions.

I am fully aware how difficult and painful it is, to relinquish a favorite and long and fondly cherished opinion; which has grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength. But any and every sacrifice must be made, for the promotion of truth. Although it should be like the loss of a right arm, or the plucking out of a right eye, the sacrifice must be made, if you wish to acquire the character of orthodox worshippers in the temple of science. In this religion, as in all true religion, there is only one right way; and if you desire to avoid the rocks of infidelity, and escape shipwreck, your faith must be of the right kind; and then your works will certainly be those of righteousness.

A pretended desire to simplify the practice of medicine, prevails to a certain extent in our profession; and we find among this class, that each one has his particular method, which is his hobby. These *hobbyhorsical* Doctors, are greatly to be deprecated. It is an unsafe animal to mount, under any circumstances; but when bestrode by a physician, is more restive, and vicious, and dangerous, than at any other time. If the Doctor's own

limbs, were alone in jeopardy, it would not so much matter—but as he obliges his patients, to mount behind him, it comes to be a serious affair to them. Their lives not unfrequently pay the forfeit, and the physician himself, is at length cast into the ditch by the road side; a melancholy example of wretched horsemanship.

Even if the facts are certain, and the principles correct, which are so highly favored, it is impossible they can be of universal applicability; and consequently must often be employed, when other remedies would answer a better purpose.

I need not remind you, that you have duties to perform to the profession of which you have become members. I trust you will not rest satisfied, merely to keep pace with the progress of improvement, as carried forwards by others; that a nobler ambition animates your resolves; and that you contemplate contributing your portion to the general stock of medical truth; and in this manner, assisting to elevate the scientific character of our common country.

He who discovers a mode of curing a disease previously immedicable; or a more safe, certain, pleasant, and speedy method, of arresting any malady, than was before known, is unquestionably better entitled to the laurel crown, and the poet's lays, than he who subjugates empires at the expense of human suffering and human life.

And if he is not so much caressed and admired by the giddy multitude—if no songs of joy, nor shouts of applauding millions, greet his progress through life—if no triumphal arch, nor colossal statue, record his worth, or show forth the gratitude of his country, after death, he nevertheless enjoys the exquisite pleasure, arising from the consciousness of having been the means of assuaging pain and mitigating anguish—of preserving life, instead of destroying it. He is regarded as one of heaven's ministering agents, to alleviate the unavoidable

misery of our mortal condition—he is looked upon as an angel of peace and happiness, not as the ruthless butcher of his fellow-beings—and an imperishable fame awaits him, in the annals of our science; and in the honor accumulating down to the latest posterity, upon the heads of those, who treading in his steps, are enabled to afford relief to suffering humanity.

There is then presented before you, gentlemen, a glorious career of usefulness, and honor. The love of fame, philanthropy, religion, all invite you to press forward; and the harvest is rich which you are called to reap.

Disease and death are never idle; and you need only look around you, over society, to see those emblems of woe, which are the trophies of their prowess. All the ingenuity and resources of the most accomplished in our ranks, have not qualified us to combat successfully in many cases, where we ought to be conquerors. And while the old and crippled, are successively retiring from the hard-fought field, you will be called upon to take their places in the van; to sustain the brunt of the battle; to restore the conflict; and devise new plans, for accomplishing what they failed to perform, and achieving victories where they were disgraced by defeat.

There is then no place for idlers or cowards. The strong-breasted and the lion-hearted, are the men we want. Men who will be found at their posts, ready for the time of trial, when such ferocious enemies as the one who visited us recently, and who has scarcely yet passed out of sight, come thundering on, like the barbarians of old, upon the smiling plains of Italy, spreading devastation and dismay all around. Men who will not hesitate to expose health and life, in the discharge of the obligations they have come under.

You are about to enter upon a chequered scene. If spared to three score and ten, you will look back with

astonishment at your progress; so different from your expectations at this moment. More fortunate in some respects; less so in others. But when your heads shall have become hoary with the dust of years, your views of life will vary much, from those you entertain at present.

Now, the thought of living unknown, unnoticed, unrenowned; of dying unpraised, and unepitaphed, chills the current of your spirits; and comes like a nipping frost, over all your most delightful anticipations. Then, when the tottering frame gives too sure tokens of decay; and the spirit-stirring movements of ambition are hushed to slumber; and the weary fancy no longer calls up the ready imagery; and the joys of thoughts, unthought of before, have long disappeared; it will not be the remembrance of the honors you shall have acquired, or the triumphs you shall have obtained, that will cheer your downward progress to life's close. Then, when the noisy tongue of fame, can no longer rouse the sleepy feelings, and calm philosophy, pale and thoughtful, appears like the minister of death, bearing the dreaded summons, your anxious minds will instinctively turn to the recollection of the tears of the widow, which shall have been dried; to the cries of the orphan, which shall have been hushed; to the ragged and hungry children of poverty, who shall have been clothed and fed, by the soothing ministrations of your benevolence.

The review of a well spent life—employed in fulfilling the great end of your creation, will then form the ground of your consolation and support, and enable you to submit with resignation, to the final blow, of the universal conqueror of our race.

You have my best wishes, that such may be the happy progress and termination of your career.

Report Am. Bible Socy.
Short's Florida Lexington.
Dissertation on Malig. Fever.
J. S. Allen's discourse, Linne Coll.
Transylvanian.
Catalogue of Plants, Short.
Woods' Baccalaureate
Wythe's Eulogy on Lafayette.
Med. Soc. Gene.
Overton's Case Spou. Conchus.
Caldwell's Anniversary Address.
" on Multiplying Med. Schs.
Best's Talk of Mem. Equiv.
Lindsley's Dis. Edgar.
Colton's Address, Pa.
Wickliffe's B. & A. Address.
Rep. Bible Socy.

[Faint, illegible handwriting on aged paper, likely bleed-through from the reverse side.]

Caldwell, New Hampshire
Journal of Health
Balt. Relig. Magazine
Catalogue Trans. N. 1835
Annals & Advers.

Collected in the
Garden of the
St. Mary's Hospital
Collected Nov. 1831
St. Mary's Hospital.

